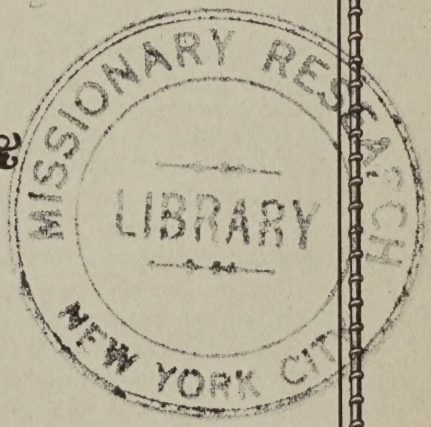
Pam
Missions
1785

MISSIONS IN THIS AGE

By

FRANCIS C. M. WEI, PH. D.



Presented at the Triennial Meeting of
THE WOMAN'S AUXILIARY
TO THE NATIONAL COUNCIL
ATLANTIC CITY, NEW JERSEY

[1946?]

MISSIONS IN THIS AGE

I AM speaking not only as one from the Church in China with a profound sense of gratitude for what the Church in the United States has done for us with the assistance of the Woman's Auxiliary, but, also, as a student of the Christian Missionary Movement in the world now facing an unfinished task.

The motive of the Missionary Movement is obvious. As Christians we are all missionaries. Let me quote from the Christian Message of the Jerusalem Conference to which I subscribed when it was first passed on Olivet. "Our true and compelling motive lies in the very nature of the God to whom we have given our hearts. Since He is love, His very nature is to share. Christ is the expression in time of the eternal self-giving of the Father. Coming into fellowship with Christ we find in ourselves an overmastering impulse to share Him with others. We are constrained by the love of Christ and by obedience to His last command. He has become life to us. We would share that life."

Such is our missionary obligation, our responsibility to proclaim the Christian Message to all the world.

But it has often been objected that Christians representing one type of culture have no right to impose their religion and culture upon other peoples with other cultural types, that these peoples would live more happily if let alone with their old religious beliefs and old ways of living which, good or bad, have sufficed for ages, and that missionaries in many places, particularly where the culture is simpler, have been the cause of cultural disintegration and consequently the cause of much social disorganization and conflict.

It is not my purpose here to justify the methods employed by all missionaries in all lands and at all times. Missionaries are human, and it is human to err. I would like to be quite sure, however, that such objections as mentioned above have not come from the desire to see all the colorful and picturesque races in different parts of the world preserved as living museum specimens, so to speak, or from the fear that when the simpler peoples get to know more about the

outside world it would be less profitable and mean more strenuous work to trade with them. I wish to ask myself and my fellow-Christians whether we, too, are not apt to hide ourselves behind objections like these when our faith in the universality of our religion becomes shaken and, therefore, our zeal for the missionary cause becomes dim. For one, I can speak as a representative of the Chinese nation who has watched the missionary at close range and takes to heart the great importance of conserving the best in the Chinese culture during this period of violent changes in the Orient.

China in her history has not been a nation unchanged all the time. The changes taking place at present are only more rapid and more far-reaching than usual. It would be twisting the facts to attribute all these changes to the work of the missionaries. The traders and the returned students contribute as much, if not more, to the present situation. Our doors were forced open to international trade in the middle of the 19th century. Commerce means contact, and in this case contact, particularly, with the material aspects of western civilization. One of our leading professors of sociology in a government university, a non-Christian educated abroad, writes as follows: "If the Christian missionaries tried in vain for more than a century to convert the nation to their religion, the industrial *entrepreneurs* and traders of countries with the European cultural complex have certainly succeeded with remarkable success in persuading the Chinese to adhere to their cult. It is in this sense that the conquest of the European culture may be said to be complete. What an irony it is that where religion failed, industry and commerce succeeded and that the gospel of profit and gain has a higher survival value than that of love."

The Christian missionaries have not tried in vain, nor has the gospel of profit and gain really a higher survival value in the last analysis. This quotation shows clearly, however, what an alarming impression a careful student of the social development in China gets of the general trend of things in the country. China is being modernized, and no one can stem the tide even if it is desirable to do so.

The circumstances under which China was brought into contact with the West during the last one hundred years have made China

desperate in her efforts to get the power and the skill of the West which western science and western political organization can bring. Modern schools are put up, the whole educational system has been completely revolutionized, students are sent abroad, and they are returning to the country by the hundreds every year, some of them to occupy important positions in politics, in industry, in education, and in commerce. Surely and steadily China's culture is being changed. We are getting western science which brings us power and skill. We are getting political organization along western lines which gives us solidarity and national strength. At the same time new ideas are being introduced through education in the schools and the colleges, through translated books and the press, all of which put a premium on individual initiative which means social changes and the weakening of traditions.

All this is very well. No one should deprecate changes if they are properly directed and are conducive to the best interest of China and her happy relations with other nations. But we have examples in the world which show that material development and the increase of power and skill mean only national aggrandizement, a menace to others.

Under the circumstances, it is futile to bemoan the changes in the social structure of a country like China. Social disintegration is inevitable. Whether it is a preliminary step to social re-integration or merely a destructive process depends upon whether the spiritual power in the nation is strong enough to direct and mold the material forces.

Is it, then, justifiable to attempt to let the Chinese alone by asking the Christian missionaries to stay away from them with the belief that their old culture and their religions will suffice? Whether Christianity has succeeded or not in the West to direct the forces of material development during the last century is a question that well deserves our attention, but we shall not go into it now. Christianity is, nevertheless, the one great force emphasizing human above material values, and calling attention to the importance of the relation between man and man rather than the relation of man and his natural environment.

Casual observation has led some of us in the East to believe that much of the restlessness in the West is due to the fact that during the last century your thinkers and leaders have given more of their energy and thought to problems of harnessing physical nature to human purpose, and not enough attention to the problems of adjusting human relationships to the new physical environment that is being opened up to you every day. Power and skill are developed. The individual is liberated from tradition and social sanction. A mighty political machinery is evolved. From this you have your social maladjustments and international conflicts.

At the threshold of material development in China we desire a program that is better under control. We need greater spirituality to keep us sober in the in-pouring of material power. Our people at present would welcome anything that has the key to the many social, political, and international problems which confront you now and will confront us. In fact, we are face to face with them already. In a state of desperateness the Chinese people are prepared to accept any panacea that promises to be a cure to our present national and social ailments and a preventive to the many troubles in store for us in the future. At one time we were ready to accept communism. Even now every "ism" has its advocates in China. Who has the right, then, to debar the Chinese from the privilege of getting from the missionaries the message which is not their own, but God's? The Chinese have the right to hear the Gospel and the missionary has the obligation to preach it to them. To maintain any other position would be gross injustice to the Chinese.

It would be injustice, also, to the Christian message that the Chinese should not be given a chance to receive it and give it expression according to their national genius and social heritage. Many people find fault with the Christian message owing to the inadequate expression hitherto given to it in human life and thought. The message has not found its complete expression yet, and it cannot have its complete expression until all the nations and races in the world have made their contribution. This thought makes us Chinese both humble and bold: humble, because we in the present generation have

inherited richly from the past and our history has taught us that as our fathers down the ages have molded our civilization by incorporating into our cultural stock every truth that works for social stability and the enrichment of social life, we have to assume the responsibility of improving upon it by following truth wherever it may lead us; and bold, because we are of the firm conviction that the survival of our culture and the long continuity of our national life through all the vicissitudes of history and circumstances have not been without a purpose and have not been possible without Divine guidance. Careful study of our own culture shows that our religious development in the past has been the best preparation for Christianity. Those who know the Chinese will know that they are the most natural Christians if they only know Christ as He deserves to be known. The Confucian system which has been the basis of the Chinese social structure seems to have exhausted its vitality and is waiting for the Christian religion to breathe into it the Spirit of God so as to have a new soul and be alive again. The Christian message is to be the fulfillment of the Chinese social heritage and its acceptance by the Chinese will give it a new expression which is sure to enable the world to understand it better. The Christian message is for universal application. To say that the Chinese should rest content with their own religions and not to have a chance of hearing the Christian Gospel is to deny Christianity its universality.

This makes me bold to assert finally that it would be doing the world injustice if the Chinese are not helped to understand the Christian message and to give it expression in terms of their own culture. The racial experience of a quarter of mankind with a history of 4,000 years ought to be too valuable to be taken lightly. Christianity has been a mighty force in human history. The world can only know its real power when the Chinese people begin to take the Christian religion more seriously. For us Chinese, religion is not singled out and put in a pigeon-hole for convenient reference. For this reason we did not even have a term for "religion" until one was coined for it in recent times. When Christianity is embraced by the Chinese the rest of the world may see how the Christian religion can penetrate

every department of life. The acceptance of the Christian religion by the Chinese is a matter that ought to concern the whole world.

That is the business of the Chinese, some people would, perhaps, say in this country. But it is your task as well. It is our joint task. The Christian work in China has been started by missionaries sent out from Churches in this country, Canada and Europe. The Church is planted there, but the task still remains unfinished.

One of the outstanding achievements of the Christian work in China is in the field of Christian education. The total enrollment in the secondary schools in the whole country is approximately 500,000; 6.6 per cent are in Christian schools. The enrollment in the universities and colleges is 44,000, and 13.8 per cent of these are in Christian colleges. Our schools are highly appreciated by the Chinese Government as well as by the Chinese public. For the first time in the history of modern education in China the Central Government this year makes an appropriation of $720,000 as grants-in-aid for private institutions above the secondary grade. The grants made to Christian institutions amount to 43 per cent of the total appropriation.

Christian leaders, foreign or Chinese, are trusted everywhere. During the unprecedented flood of 1931, the government set aside huge sums of money for the relief of the refugees who had been rendered homeless and destitute. When the National Flood Relief Commission was appointed two of our missionaries in Central China were called to serve. The Communists are being dislodged from the Kiangsi Province, and $1,900,000 is to be spent by the government for the rehabilitation of the district formerly occupied by them. It was proposed to the National Christian Council that the Christian Churches should take over the work.

Indeed, the influence of the Christians in China is far greater than their numerical strength. There are only 400,000 Protestant Christians and 1,500,000 Roman Catholics, making a total of approximately 2,000,000, which is only ½ of 1 per cent of China's population. But the number of Christians in leading positions in the government and in other walks of life is amazing. The most powerful General in the country and his wife are Christians. Take the Province

of Hupeh, where Central China College is with Boone College as a co-operating unit. The Governor is not a professed Christian but he is sympathetic. His wife is a Christian. The Commissioner of Education and his wife are Christians. So also are the Mayor of Hankow and his wife.

But we have to remember that 99½ per cent of our population of 460,000,000 are yet to be brought into the fold of the Church. The Christian forces in the country are still too feeble to undertake the work without assistance from the older Churches in other countries. It is hardly fair to leave the young Church in China confronted by such an overwhelming situation without outside help. What is true of China is true of the other young Churches in the Far East.

The economic depression has, of course, created a situation in your own country which demands immediate attention. But it is only a passing phase, we hope. To prevent its recurrence the world has to be made more Christlike. You did not go to the mission fields in the past because you believed the people there were the worst of the world and they alone were then in need. You went because they were a part of the world and shared with you in the same human need. You sent your missionaries not because there was no need of Christian work in your land. You sent them because you could not bear the thought that men anywhere in the world should live without Christ. You have not lost that faith. The depression is a test to your Christian faith, a real challenge. I am sure you can meet it in spiritual triumph.

Yes, the mission in China as well as in other parts of the world where the younger Churches are not sufficiently strong in finance or personnel to carry on the work without outside aid, is the unfinished task which must be completed by our joint efforts. To call our joint responsibility the responsibility now of the young growing Churches because of financial difficulties in this country is a weakening step backward which may be interpreted as losing faith in a great cause, when you should look forward with us to sure victory in full confidence of the power of the Spirit.

The economic depression in America has made it necessary for the Church to cut down its budget for missionary work in all the fields. It has been cut to the bone. Work in China, as well as work in every other field, has been curtailed. We see the opportunity for great things, but our progress is hampered.

Let me take, for example, the China field again, which is the field in which I have first-hand experience about which I can speak with confidence. Political conditions are improving. Today we are nearer to the day of a united China under a strong central government than we have ever been for over two decades. The government is sympathetic. The anti-Christian movement about which so much was heard some years ago, has blown over. Many people are eager to hear the Gospel. The Christian schools and colleges are filled to the brim with students eager to learn. It is the time for our work to go forward. It is the time of all times for us to make an impression upon the national life of the Chinese by winning for the Christian movement a permanent place in the development of this country. But at this critical time we are handicapped by the thought of budget cut, retrenchment, thus letting our golden opportunity slip by.

It is the most cheering thing, however, to come to this country at this particular moment and find the laymen's movement of "Everyman's Offering," sending the bugle call "Hold the Line." I have had the pleasure of meeting some of the leaders of that movement. It does one's heart good to see their enthusiasm, their courage, their faith in God and in their fellow men. "Hold the Line," they call. Echoing to this call I hear the voices from all the mission fields, "March forward!" This is no time to retreat or even to stand still.

We in the foreign fields need your continued support not only in money but also in personnel. You represent the Church in America with older traditions and more mature experience. These traditions and experience are yours of course. We cannot take them over *en bloc*. But we have much to learn from you before we can build up our traditions and get deeper experiences. We, therefore, welcome your representatives whom you send as missionaries to us. The Church in China needs this help.

In the year 1919, I was a student in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and one evening I went to see an old friend in Lawrence Hall in the Episcopal Theological School, who was on furlough from China and was visiting the School. My missionary friend said to me in his usual clear, solemn voice, "Francis, ten years ago a Chinese student, now a Christian leader in China, said to me in this very hall, that in ten years' time China would need no more missionaries from America. Now, the ten years have passed by and missionaries are still going there. Suppose I give you ten years more, would you say that by 1929 you would still need American missionaries in China?" I was no prophet but I saw the signs of the times and I answered without the slightest hesitation in the affirmative. It was my feeling then and it is my feeling now that the Church in China will continue to need missionaries from America for many years yet to come.

We need missionaries from America not only to help us to face the tremendous task of finishing the work which the pioneers have started and which is yet unfinished, but we need your missionaries in order that we may share with you through them the traditions and experience you have had. Furthermore, it is dangerous to attempt to build up a national Church in China by ourselves, even though we had the resources and personnel of our own to do it without outside help. We want a Chinese indigenous Church, a Church which presents the life and teachings of Jesus through the cultural heritage of the Chinese people. But to have a Church that is exclusively Chinese and narrow-mindedly national is un-Christian.

Of course, we need missionaries of different kinds of training and experience, but we need particularly men and women from the older Churches who can help us to train Christians for leadership. The problems confronting the young Church in China are overwhelming and the task everywhere is tremendous. Especially in Christian education we need the very best men and women. Fifteen years I was trying to get a man with a Ph.D. degree to go to teach in a Christian college in China. He said almost in these words to me, "No, you don't need men of specialized training." He may have been right then, particularly in his case. But Christian education in China

today demands the very best the Church in America can give. We Chinese take education seriously and it is the scholar that has the respect of the people according to our age-long tradition.

In other fields of missionary activities, also, the Church in China expects the very best from the older Churches in the West. To help us to face the most perplexing problems, to enable us to see ahead, to guide us in formulating the program and in laying the foundation of the Church's work, we need men from you with the best training, deep sympathy, keen moral and spiritual insight.

Much has been said about the soundness of mission policy and the wisdom of mission methods. There is really no policy that applies to all mission fields and no methods that can produce results at all times. The important thing is to hold steadfastly to the vision of Christlike human relationships wherever men are found. The true missionary motive of the earnest missionary who has completely surrendered to God will have no difficulty in adapting his policy and his methods to the circumstances of the time and the needs of the people. Every policy, however good, is good only in a given situation.

Permit me to take our mission in China again as an illustration. The development of the Church in China may be divided roughly into four stages. The first is that of the lonely pioneer missionary, coming to a new field to break the ground. He has no policy, for he has yet to make the acquaintance of the people and to study the conditions of the situation. He has not even methods except the methods that have been tested in other fields by other workers. There burning in his heart is the motive to share with his fellow men the Christ he has known. He has the zeal to make known the God to whom he has dedicated his life. Maybe for years he makes no converts. His work seems to produce no result. But he is sure of his cause. Love is bound to win. God knows no defeat.

Then the second stage comes. Some people have been won. The work begins to develop. A policy has been formulated. Methods have been tried, modified, tried again, some successful and others not so. Slowly, property is acquired as the basis of mission operation. A church may have been erected for worship and as the center of mis-

sion activities. Natives are enlisted to help in the growing work. It is the stage of the mission compound.

In due course of time the third stage is reached. The Church has been planted. There is a native ministry. The laity are organized. One center of church activity is added to another. Organization is getting completed. The Church begins to take its place alongside of other "National" Churches. It is the stage of the young Church, fully grown, prepared to accept responsibility, ready to face the task, but not strong enough in personnel or in financial resources to undertake the challenging situation without assistance from the older Churches in other lands. At this stage the Church is not self-supporting. It cannot be. But it ought to be autonomous. Whether autonomy and self-support must necessarily go together is a question for the philosopher of missions. Personally I question the wisdom of those who answer this arbitrarily in the affirmative. The Church in China has decidedly reached this stage and it is a mistake to regard the work there as if it is still at the second stage; the stage of the mission compound when every American mail brings orders concerning mission policy and mission methods.

We work towards the fourth stage, which is still remote. In God's appointed time that stage will be reached when the Church in China will be completely self-supporting, when a Chinese leadership will be raised sufficiently strong to carry the Church's program and sufficiently numerous to staff the different departments of the Church's activities. Left alone the young struggling Church in China will reach this stage some day. But it will be a long dreary process. China is in a stage of desperateness. At this juncture of the development of the nation, it is a mistake to think that time in China is still measured in centuries. Every decade now sees radical changes. The Church must work while it is day and we need the assistance both in finance and in personnel which the Church in America can give us to carry on the work.

At this stage of our development the Churches in other lands must treat the Church in China as a younger brother—I prefer the term "brother Church" for it suggests masculinity even when I am

addressing the Womans Auxiliary,—the Church in other lands must treat the Church in China as a younger brother, fully grown but not strong enough to do the work of the family in a distant place without assistance in sympathy, in support, and in prayer from the other brothers. But he must be treated as a grown-up brother, not perpetually as a boy under tutelage.

May it be possible for the Church in America to catch the vision that the Church in China is commissioned as a "Church Missionary" to win for the Mother Church, the Church Universal, the teeming millions in China, to finish the great task started by the older Churches in America, in England, and in Canada but still unfinished. It is for the Church in China now to finish it. The older Churches are to help, but it must not be forgotten that the Church in China is a Church fully grown and must be treated as such. What I have said of the Church in China may well apply with any necessary modification to the Church in other lands.

Copies of this pamphlet may be obtained at five cents each from the Woman's Auxiliary, Church Missions House, 281 Fourth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

1E. 8-4. 5M. JAA.

DATE DUE

SEP 19 '69			
GAYLORD			PRINTED IN U.S.A.